EXPLORING INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The demand by the public for increased efficiency and reduction of cost has caused the Wilson Fire and Rescue Services (WF/RS) to eliminate the battalion chiefs position from shifts. One of the primary functions of battalion chiefs was to communicate the goals and objectives of the organization to employees and coordinate activities. By eliminating the positions interpersonal communication complaints have increased. Many programs and activities have not been completed on schedule.

This research paper will address the problems associated with interpersonal communication and how it relates to the supervisor's role. The purpose of this research project was to identify the current communication level, define problem areas and make the necessary interpretation to suggest recommendations for improvement.

An evaluative research method was employed to answer the following questions:

1. What are some of the affects of poor interpersonal communication?

2. What are effective stepping stones toward improving interpersonal communication?

3. What impact has the removal of battalion chiefs position had on interpersonal communication?

The procedure used in this research project was to exercise and extensive literature research to obtain as much information as possible on the recent information available pertaining to interpersonal communication. The exploration was also conducted to provide help in understanding what affect removing battalion chiefs from shifts had on interpersonal communication and how it has impacted company officers. An inter-department survey was conducted among personnel in the operations division to measure how personnel felt about interpersonal communications since removing battalion chiefs. One personal interview was conducted with a local communication instructor.

The results revealed that interpersonal communication has been recognized by many organizations to be the most noted problem. Among their prospective teams the supervisors and managers are the major contributors to the success or failure of interpersonal communication. Common affects and stepping stones of poor interpersonal communication were outlined. The survey concluded that half the department felt removing battalion chiefs had a negative effect on interpersonal communications. Other parts of the survey that measured supervisor interpersonal communication and what affect it had on job performance contradicts the comments and complaints from personnel on interpersonal communication. The survey concluded that as a whole the department feels communication at their level was good. The comment section of the survey noted that staff officers (division chiefs and fire chief) are not meeting with personnel or keeping them informed of department projects and programs.

It was recommended that WF/RS continue to evaluate interpersonal communication and provide specific training for supervisors in this area. It was also recommended that staff officers play a more active role in communicating formally and informally with the personnel in operations division.

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INTRODUCTION

The Wilson Fire and Rescue Services (WF/RS), like most other fire departments, depends on effective internal communications on the fire ground and day to day activities to meet the goals and objectives of the organization. In the past, interpersonal communications has not been very effective due to the culture of the organization. The department's culture did not encourage education or officer development. The training and culture have changed dramatically in the past few years, but interpersonal communications still remains a problem, particularly at the leadership level.

The demand by the public for increased efficiency and reduction of cost has created a shrinking budget and reduction in personnel for the WF/RS. Due to a mandatory reduction in the work force in 1995, the department was reduced from 89 to 82 personnel. By decreasing the personnel and increasing the workload, the need for effective communication and guidance from the leadership of the organization has become even more imperative. Unnecessary and improper information wastes time, money, energy, and the talent of the personnel at all levels of the organization. With already limited resources the department can not afford to waste what little we do have.

Along with the reduction of personnel there has been a significant increase in the workload and sick leave usage. The 1998/1999-budget report showed an increase of 86 percent sick leave, 38 percent increase in calls for service, 18 percent increase of coverage area, 18 percent increase in hydrants maintained and 40 percent increase in annual leave taken. Due to budget restraints and cutbacks in personnel, the department felt they needed to organize the limited resources in a more efficient manner. The last personnel reduction resulted in the elimination of our shift commander positions. The remaining chief officers were placed on 40-hour schedules and only respond to large incidents involving multi company response. This has placed even more responsibility on company officers to plan and

coordinate day to day activities, fire ground operations, fire prevention programs and district coverage. This new concept seems to be working well in many areas, but there have been numerous complaints from all levels within the organization concerning the lack of effective and accurate communications.

As a result of the rapid and progressive changes that have taken place in the last six years, the communications level within the department may be suffering, resulting in misunderstandings and less work. This research paper will address the problems with internal communication in the WF/RS. Since the responsibility for communicating rest primarily on the leadership of the organization, officers are the primary focus of this research. The purpose of this research project is to identify the current communication level, define problem areas and make the necessary interpretations to suggest recommendations for improvements.

An evaluative research method was employed to answer the following questions. The research questions to be answered are as follows.

1. What are some of the affects of poor interpersonal communication?

2. What are some effective stepping stones toward improving interpersonal communication?

3. What impact has the removal of battalion chiefs position had on interpersonal communication?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Incorporated in 1849, Wilson, North Carolina is ideally situated in Eastern North Carolina only 50 miles east of Raleigh, the state's capital and 100 miles west of the Atlantic Ocean.

Though a small city of approximately 23 square miles and 43,000 people, Wilson is diversified in the world of business. It is home to the headquarters of Branch Banking & Trust Company, Merck

Pharmaceutical, Firestone/Bridgestone, Foster Forbes, the world's largest tobacco market and many other widely recognized corporations.

Wilson Fire/Rescue Services

Since its beginning, the City of Wilson has provided fire service protection to its citizens. Originally, this service was provided by a handful of volunteers and progressed to 89 paid personnel. The city fire department is the only career department in the county and has mutual aid agreements with the 11 volunteer fire departments serving the County of Wilson.

Traditionally the WF/RS had always been a strict paramilitary autocratic style department structured from top down. This management style did not encourage participation or open communications from rank and file members. This type attitude has been detrimental toward improving the interpersonal communications from officers, between officers and the department as a hold.

In order to bring about change, in 1992 the city hired a new chief from out of state who encouraged communications and implemented a participatory style of management in the department. By encouraging participation and utilizing committees, Chief Don Oliver has improved the level of communications within the department significantly, but some of the old attitudes and beliefs still remain. By utilizing this style of management the department has progressed into a highly trained and well-equipped fire suppression force. Services include first responder emergency medical care, technician level hazardous material response team, proactive fire prevention inspection programs and award winning innovative public education programs.

In keeping pace with the demand of our citizens "to do more with less," the WF/RS has undergone its third reorganization within the past five years. At the direction of City Council, the city's workforce was reduced by nine percent. The department was required to eliminate seven positions. A task force

composed of representatives from all ranks of the department identified two deputy chiefs, one battalion chief and four firefighter positions that could be eliminated. In 1997, the WF/RS reorganization provided four, 40-hour division chiefs to function as division heads under the direction of the fire chief. The following are areas of responsibilities of each division chief:

Operations Division Chief – Responsible for emergency response and management, water systems, communication system and safety program management.

Fire Prevention Division Chief – Manages inspection programs, public education, fire investigation and water system maintenance.

Resource Development Division Chief – Manages personnel development programs and coordinates department training programs.

Support Services Division Chief – Budget administration coordinator, information management, equipment maintenance and records management.

One of the four division chiefs is required to respond on multi-company emergencies which is rotated on a weekly basic. Since division chiefs work weekdays from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM and are only called in case of major incidents, there is little communications between the on duty division chief and fire personnel after 5:00 PM. By not having a battalion chief on duty, more authority, responsibility and accountability has been delegated to the company officers. This has increased the burden on chief officers and company officers to be more comprehensive and effective in communicating the mission, goals and objectives of the organization with other fire personnel.

This research project relates to several areas of subject matter covered in the course *Executive Leadership*. As stated in chapter seven the culture of the organization has a strong influence on change and how it is perceived. Three reorganizations in the last five years place the department in constant

transition. It is imperative that this transition be managed effectively and not hinder the effectiveness of internal communications (Student Manual, pg.7-5, 10-3,11-4). This research will help this author to access and improve the effectiveness of current communication level and make recommendations for improvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review was to explore the internal communications of the WF/RS and how it has been impacted by the recent reorganization, which has removed the battalion chiefs from shift. Hopefully, it will bring information that can be utilized to improve department efficiency, time, money and moral.

The following quote by Jerry Johnson, Director of Menninger Foundation, was taken from *Public Management Magazine* article entitled, Interpersonal Relationships in the Office (Johnson, 1984). This quote captures the importance of this research project.

> **Organizations are made not of office furniture and personal computers, but of people. As the people are, so will the organization be. Each organization is different, not necessarily because of differing goals, or objectives, or tasks, or products produced, but because of a myriad of people with differing personalities, personal expectations and goals, and attitudes about work. There is potential for conflict, divisiveness, and destructiveness, as well as creativity, task accomplishment and friendship when people are brought together to work in a common environment and for a common purpose (pg. 4).**

In 1978 a *Fortune Magazine* survey of the top 500 corporate leaders, identified communication as the most noted problem. Effective interpersonal communication techniques directly affect training

sessions, community relations, negotiations, and emergency communications. Fire service personnel

participate daily in various types of communication: one-to-one conversations, one-to-many,

communications with the public, negotiations and emergency communications (Allen, 1978, pg. 20).

The way information was conveyed has changed dramatically the past few years with technological

advances in telephones, pagers, cell phones, fax machines and the Internet. Considering the

technological resources available today, one would think interpersonal communications would have

improved dramatically. This may or may not be true, due to the ever-increasing amount of information

that has to be received, transmitted and comprehended each day, which may lead too information

overload.

Walt Disney World article from *Executive Leadership* course greatly influenced this author to

research the internal communications of the WF/RS. Walt Disney World estimates that 90 percent of all

organizational problems have to do with poor communications. For this reason, they have devoted an

eight-member department solely to the task of employee communication. The department uses a

communication plan that has four primary vehicles to send and receive communications, personal

contact, printed material, audiovisual aids, and the environment itself sends a subtle message. This

emphasis on communication has reaped many benefits for WDW and its employees. A WDW manager

summed up the communication philosophy by saying, "the area is only as strong as its weakest

supervisor" (Burkell, 1995, pg.57).

The most important part of any relationship, whether it's with kids, dogs or the people that you

work with, is communication. Time spent working on clear, direct and consistent communication will

pay off in many ways. Most important, your life will get easier if you don't have to deal with the

consequences of poor communication, which will bring poor morale and incomplete work assignments (Metcalf, 1999, pg. 61).

An organization with constant interpersonal relationship failures will have trouble meeting basic department goals and objectives (Ozog, 1996, pg.14). Ozog goes on to state there are situations that hamper or create friction in interpersonal relationships, and he lists several causes:

- Unclear performance standards can create an atmosphere destine for trouble.

- The ability to maintain effective relationships will be difficult if individuals have had past problems.

- Employee stress is increased when the department has no clear mission; no one knows what other team members are doing.

- Top down management philosophy destroys trust needed for good interpersonal communications.

- Unclear communication process creates miscommunications, which hamper completion of projects (pg.15).

Ozog goes on to explain most managers must communicate on a daily basic and it is essential that they plan and practice responses prior to specific situations. He offers the following guidelines to assist in planning your response.

- It is essential to take the time to gather your thoughts before you respond.

- Never attempt to communicate when you are angry.

- Be prepared to give specific and honest feedback in interactions, which may be difficult if information may not be favorable to receiver.

- Avoid scare or pressure tactics in interactions.

- Be consistent when dealing with people, it is essential for building interpersonal relationships.

- Follow through on all commitments and admit when you make a mistake.

- When providing discipline, constructive criticism, do it in private and respect confidentiality (Ozog, 1996, pg.15).

Thomas Swan states that effective communications must have two things happen simultaneously, information must be accurately presented and second, it must be accurately received and interpreted by the listener. Swan also discusses two primary barriers to communications; people sometimes fail to understand the message because they daydream instead of listening to the message. Second, people do not agree with the listener's attitude or beliefs, which may cause dissonance (Swan, 1992, pg.79).

Steven Mihelic in his research project *Changing Organizational Culture* (1995) states that communication is a vital part in the changing of process and culture. He also emphasizes that communication must be meaningful and sincere. He goes on to say that people must be listened to and believe that their input is of value (Mihelic, 1995 pg.13).

According to a monthly published newsletter entitled *Communication Briefings*, ineffective communication often results in poor cooperation and coordination, lower productivity, undercurrents of tension, gossip and rumors, and increased turnover and

 absenteeism. They also list many ways in which managers can improve internal communications. Here are some things they should do:

- Understanding that communication is a two-way street, by giving and getting feedback from employees.

- Rely mainly on face to face communications, not bulletin boards, memos and other written communication.

- Don't be vague with message; be specific in what you are saying.

- Do not view information as power, but a service to employee.

- Show respect for what employees have to say.

- Allow people to disagree and come with new ideas.

- Ask employees how managers can do a better job.

- Prepare frequent publications that are up-to-date and informative.

- Build credibility, managers who employees do not believe lack credibility (Gillespie, 1999, pg. 3).

In the research paper, Exploring 360-Degree Feedback Performance Appraisal, Thomas Parker recommended adoption of 360-degree feedback performance appraisals. He stated that many managers find it difficult to provide specific and critical feedback to employees during performance reviews; they tend to shy away from addressing poor performance issues. This process creates an environment in which employees receive little negative feedback from supervisors and expect to be rewarded for mediocre performance (Parker, 1998, pg.12).

Michael Smith states in a magazine article entitled Communication skills for a changing fire service; "effectively communicating with personnel is an essential part of leadership". Smith suggests certain blocks or distractions that can prevent you from hearing everything said. Some of these blocks are as follows:

- Rehearsing response or trying to make a point rather than listening to what is being said.

- Filtering or hearing only what they want.

- Judging someone to be wrong or crazy, before they have a chance to tell their side of situation.

- Hasty advice to subordinate is often used to dismiss and prevent a discussion of the real problem (Smith, 1992, pg. 82-83).

One on the biggest problems with communication may be the lack of organizing your work site. The ever-popular post-it and note pads with scribbling all over them often get misplaced or forgotten. Linda Rothschild suggests that instead of note pads we should use a small, soft back notebook for a master list. All information that requires processing action or follow-up should be placed in the notebook. This would assure that the important items would not be forgotten or misplaced and also prevent breakdown of communications (Rothschild, 1999).

Chief Vandon R Hottle of Oklahoma City Fire Department writes "that when communication is official, the written form is preferred". Because of this, most departments' communication suffer from too much meaningless paperwork. Hottle estimates that about 80 percent of what we file are never used again. Each year paperwork should be analyzed for effectiveness, revised or purged if it is no longer needed (Hottle, 1990, pg.80).

In the resent Blue Ribbon Panels Report on USFA, major communication weaknesses between USFA and FEMA was listed as one of the major problems. In particular the leadership was blamed for not nurturing the necessary relationships to strengthen the fire programs. In response to the report Carrye Brown stated, "that she was committed to overcoming any communications barriers and that she had already begun implementation of recommendations to improve communications between Deputy Administrator and the Superintendent, as well with fire/emergency community" (Brown, 1999 pg.51).

In a six-month time frame from January to June of 1998, a task force comprised of members from all ranks of the WF/RS created an officer development program, which identified technical and soft skills that would prepare future and present company officers for the position. Written communication,

oral communication, personnel management and leadership are four out of nine categories identified, which was directed toward improving communication skills for company officers. Other categories that contain elements of communication skills include, fire ground operations, training and fire prevention.

In May of 1998 as part of a continuous improvement effort, the Wilson Fire/Rescue Services hired J. W. Murphy and Associates, Inc. to evaluate the recent reorganization. In order to achieve the results, they personally spent time talking with everyone in the department, mostly in small groups of five to ten. The report covered many areas that involved communication. The report indicated prior to reorganization, battalion chiefs held regular staff meetings to keep personnel informed with regard to major happenings within the department. Apparently there have been very few, if any, of these meeting since the reorganization. Fire department personnel felt that they were not being informed on projects, training and major events. J. W. Murphy and Associates, Inc. had several recommendations to improve communications. The company recommended the department hold periodic, regularly scheduled communication update meetings with all personnel. The purpose for these meetings would be to update everyone on major happenings, status of projects, upcoming events, opportunities, training, informally recognize team accomplishments and a quarterly newsletter from all divisions (Murphy, 1998). These meetings have only taken place a very few times due to the demands reorganization placed on division chiefs and shift personnel.

The following quote from Alfred C. Decrane, Jr. was taken from the book *The Leader of the Future* article entitled, A Constitutional Model of Leadership (Decrane, 1996, pg. 254).

With the utmost clarity, leaders convey well-articulated expectations of high

performance for each and every member of the organization and the belief that

everyone, including the leader, will be evaluated against those expectations on the

basis of performance. An understanding that communication is a two-way process in which leaders listen, hunger for feedback and new ideas, and are driven by a need to compel and to influence, not to command and control. An appreciation of the principle that well-informed team members are the most motivated and strongest achievers, and willingness to communicate with teams and to follow through. Confidence and trust in employees, and a desire to give opportunities to any individuals who are eager to accept the accountability that necessarily goes with responsibility.

Michael Asken writes that leaders need many qualities, particularly the ability to communicate effectively. "All form of communication must be mastered by leaders and this may take a lifetime to achieve" (Asken, 1993, pg. 20).

SUMMARY

In summary, a wealth of information in the literature review has revealed how interpersonal communications can effect the success of an organization. Many sources examined reasons associated with poor interpersonal communications, and also several recommendations were offered for improving interpersonal communications.

The literature review revealed many managers find it difficult to communicate with subordinates, particularly when giving critical feedback. Without feedback employees tend not to trust management which may cause trouble in the future.

Many sources were studied but are not listed in the reference section due to being redundant in their information. They all seem to agree on the importance of interpersonal communication and what affect it had on the success of the organization.

The information in this research paper will be provided to all officers in the WF/RS to be utilized as a tool for improving interpersonal communications.

PROCEDURES

The procedure used in this research project were to exercise an extensive literature research to obtain as much information as possible on the most recent information available pertaining to interpersonal communications. It was mostly directed at

exploring information and research pertaining to interpersonal communications between managers and employees. The author was searching for information identifying current interpersonal communication roadblocks and effective methods toward improving these roadblocks.

Numerous articles and abstracts were reviewed on management, interpersonal communication and leadership. A request was submitted to the Learning Resource Center at the National Emergency Training Center pertaining too interpersonal communication. Several articles and research papers were identified as having relevance. The articles and papers identified through the literature search were reviewed and those deemed to be pertinent to internal communication were utilized in the literature review section of the paper.

This author conducted one personal interview with Pastor Gordon Sebastian of Peace Baptist Church in Wilson, N.C. As part of an adult study class, Pastor Gordon Sebastian explained how important listening skills are when communicating with people. He lists several barriers to effective listening, and suggested ways we can develop those skills. The following was a list of barriers he provided on effective listening:

- Few people see improving listening as a way to improving communicating.

- We speak about 180 words a minute, but listen at about 300 to 500 words a minute…this difference causes the listener to lose focus.

- Listening for any length of time is exhausting.

- Stereotyping causes us to hear what we expect rather than what another person actually says.

- Your past experiences can color the way you look at life.

- Being preoccupied with self.

The following are examples he provided for developing listening skills:

- Don't interrupt speaker, we usually interrupt, because we lack value in what they say, desire to impress with our knowledge, or to excited to let them finish.

- Give speaker your undivided attention.

- Focus on understanding the speaker. We tend to lose 50 percent of what we hear immediately after hearing it and 75 percent by the next day.

- Check your emotions and suspend your judgement until you hear the entire story.

- Ask questions for clarity.

Pastor Sebastian says, "we should always make listening our first priority". Many people take for granted the ability to listen, but few are really capable of really listening (G. Sebastian, personal conversation, February 27, 1999).

An inter-department survey was conducted to find out how personnel felt about the interpersonal communications since the removal of shift commanders. The purpose was also to find out what affect removing battalion chiefs from shift had on interpersonal communications and how they felt about interpersonal communications from supervisors. A copy of the survey is listed in appendix A.

During the month of January, 71 out of 82 personnel employed with the department were hand-delivered a survey form and given a brief explanation of its purpose. They were told the results would be documented in this research project and possibility be used to improve interpersonal communications.

The 71 surveys included 22 firefighters, 31 engineers and 18 officers. The make up of officers included 15 captains and three lieutenants. Of the 71 surveys, 61 were completed and returned within one week. The actual percentage of the department that participated in the survey was 74 percent. Eight-hour personnel were not given the opportunity to participate in the surveys. The issues in this survey were not relevant to eight-hour personnel.

LIMITATIONS

This research project was limited by a number of factors, not the least of which was the core subject matter (i.e., interpersonal communications), defies objective measurement.

Interpersonal communications involves all aspects of our professional and personal life. This subject was so immense and broad, it was difficult to narrow the topic to a manageable area.

Limitations were limited access to subject material contained in Learning Resource Center (LRC) at the National Fire Academy. Several articles were received from LRC with good information but some were not relevant and others were redundant.

It was questionable whether the respondents of the survey by the WF/RS personnel had a good understanding of interpersonal communications. Some of the comments were not appropriate for the question. It was assumed respondents answered the survey honestly.

RESULTS

This section will provide answers to the original research questions along with a narrative description of the findings of the study.

1.   What are some of the affects of poor interpersonal communication?

From the literature review, most organizations recognize communications to be the most often noted problem. Walt Disney World (WDW) and many other corporate leaders estimates communication to be a major problem. This problem tends to be the responsibility of the leader to solve. Case in point, the resent Blue Ribbon Panel Report on USFA, pointed out major communications problems between USFA and FEMA. Carrye Brown has already addressed some of the communication issues (Brown, 1998, pg.51).

Supervisor not willing to give specific and critical feedback to employees creates an environment in which employees expect to be rewarded for mediocre performance (Parker, 1998, pg.9).

Ineffective communication often results in poor cooperation and coordination, lower productivity, undercurrents of tension, gossip and rumors, and increased turnover and absenteeism (Gillespie, 1999, pg. 3).

The following is a list from the literature review of other affects of poor communication:

- Unclear performance standards can create an atmosphere destine for trouble, and managers tend to shy away from addressing poor performance of evaluations.

- Top down management philosophy destroys trust for good interpersonal communications.

- Sometimes people daydream instead of listening to message.

- People do not agree with the beliefs and attitude of the speaker.

- Rehearsing response rather than listening to the message.

- Information must be accurately presented and it must be accurately received and understood by the listener.

- Most departments suffer from too much meaningless paperwork.

- Few people see improving listening as a way to improving communications.

- Listening for any length of time is exhausting.

2.   What are effective stepping stones toward improving interpersonal communication?

Thomas Swan believes for effective communications two things must happen simultaneously, information must be accurately presented and accurately interpreted by the listener (Swan, 1992, pg.79). People must be listened to and believe their input is of value. Communication must be meaningful and sincere (Mihelic, 1995, pg.13).

Alfred Decrane, Jr. believes frequent, open, and honest communication does inspire others to follow, including those without the benefit of a title. Leaders must convey well-articulated expectations of high performance, understand that communication is a two-way process, believe that well-informed employees are the most motivated and strongest achievers and be willing to trust employees with additional responsibilities (Decrane, 1996).

The following are a list from literature review of ways communication can be improved:

- Be specific with feedback.

- Never attempt to communicate when you are angry.

- Avoid scare or pressure tactics in interactions.

- Be consistent and follow through on all commitments.

- When providing discipline, do it in private and respect confidentiality.

- Allow people to disagree and show respect for what employees have to say.

- Prepare frequent publications that are up-to-date and informative.

- A master list of information will assure important items are not forgotten.

- Cut out unnecessary paperwork.

- Practice good listening skills and give speaker your undivided attention.

- Use meetings to update personnel of major happenings.

3.   **What impact has the removal of battalion chiefs from shift had on interpersonal**

   communication?

   A survey was conducted of the WF/RS personnel to determine how they felt about our current

interpersonal communications and what effect removing battalion chiefs has on communications.

   The first question on the survey form asked for each employee to specify his rank. The purpose

was so the data could be compiled separately by rank and also in totality by the department as a whole.

   The second statements 18.1percent of the non-officers (firefighters and engineers) strongly disagree

that elimination of shift commanders has had little effect on interpersonal communications. 22.7%

disagreed, 40.9% agreed and 11.3% strongly agreed. 47% of the officers (lieutenants and captains)

agreed that removing battalion chiefs had no impact on communications, but 41.1% disagreed and

11.7% strongly disagreed. When tallied by the department as a whole 16.3% strongly disagreed,

29.5% disagreed, 40.9% agreed and .08% strongly agreed. Four personnel had not been with the

department long enough to answer the question, because they had never worked with battalion chiefs.

The percentage difference between the officers and non-officers was not surprising, considering the fact

it was a major cultural change for many of the older officers.

Table 1

Percentage of Satisfaction with Elimination of Shift Commanders

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Non-Officers	18.1%	22.7%	40.9%	11.3%
Officers	11.9%	41.1%	47.0%	00.0%
Department	16.3%	29.5%	40.9%	.080%

To the third statement 2% of the non-officers strongly disagreed that they were satisfied with communication from supervisors. 18.1% disagreed, 59% agreed and 20.4% strongly agreed. 25.5% of officers disagreed, 73.5% agreed and 5% strongly agreed. When tallied as a whole department 1-% strongly disagreed, 19.6% disagreed, 60.6% agreed and 18% strongly agreed.

Table 2

Percentage of Satisfaction with Communication from Supervisor

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Non-Officer	2%	18.1%	59.0%	20.4%
Officers	0%	25.5%	73.5%	5%
Department	1%	19.6%	60.6%	18%

To the forth statement 6% of the non-officers strongly disagreed that interpersonal communication had not affected their ability to perform their job. 25% disagreed, 52.2% agreed and 15.9% strongly agree. 5% of the officer's strongly disagreed, 10.5% disagreed, 88.2% agreed and 0% strongly agreed. Tallied as a whole 8% strongly disagreed, 18% disagreed, 62.2% agreed and 11.4% strongly agreed.

Table 3

Percentage of Satisfaction with Affect of Communication on Job Performance

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Non Officers	6%	25%	52.2%	15.9%
Officers	5%	10.5%	88.2%	0%
Department	8%	18%	62.2%	11.4%

To the fifth statement 2% of non-officers strongly disagreed that the department provides sufficient

education and emphasis on the importance of communications. 31.8% disagreed, 54.5% agreed and

11.3% strongly agreed. 0% strongly disagreed 11.7% of officers disagreed, 76.4% agreed and 11.7%

strongly agreed. Tallied as a whole 1-% strongly disagreed, 26.2% disagreed, 60.6% agreed and

11.4% strongly agreed.

Table 4

Percentage of Satisfaction with Communication Training

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Non Officers	2%	31.8%	54.5%	11.3%
Officers	0%	11.7%	76.4%	11.7%
Department	1%	26.2%	60.6%	11.4%

The sixth question asks employees to identify other issues associated with communication. Out of

61 complete surveys, 23 wrote comments to the question. The issue of division chiefs and fire chief

holding meetings monthly or semi-annually was written five times. Need shift commanders back on shift

was written three times. Other issues or concerns written are as follows:

- Division chiefs need to respond to structure fires.

- Staff personnel need to have more communication with line personnel.

- We need to purchase a new radio system before someone gets hurt.

- We need to have someone on shift to make final decision, because all captains are the same rank and they sometimes have 15 different opinions.

- We need to have monthly structured meetings or classes on communications and team building.

- Training division could do a better job on notification of available classes and approvals of these classes.

DISCUSSION

The conclusion from this study confirms that interpersonal communication has a tremendous affect on the success of an organization. An organization with constant interpersonal failures will have trouble meeting basic department goals and objectives Ozog, 1996, pg.14). It also concludes that communication tends to be the responsibility of the leader or supervisor of the team. Leaders must convey frequent, open, and honest communication to others. They must also convey well-articulated employee expectations, understand that communication is a two-way process, believe that well-informed employees are the most motivated and strongest achievers, and be willing to trust employees with additional responsibilities (Decrane, 1996). Walt Disney World organizational philosophy states that "an organization is only as strong as its weakest supervisor" (Burkell, 1995. pg.57). The literature review disclosed that the supervisor by the nature of his position, have the responsibility to make sure they communicate effectively and accurately their expectations. It is clear that in order for organizations to meet it's goals and objectives supervisors will need to demonstrate exceptional interpersonal communication skills.

As Bill Metcalf stated, "we have all had to deal with incomplete work assignments and poor morale, but life is much easier if you don't have to deal with it". Time spent working on clear, direct

and consistent communication will pay off in many ways (Metcalf, 1999, pg.4). Everyone in literature review agrees with the premise that communications is the key for the success of an organization, and the supervisor or leader holds that key. We communicate so much information every day many people make the mistake of taking interpersonal communication for granted. We need to remember that people forget 50 percent of what you say immediately after you say it and 75 percent by the next day. This helps explain why information that was verbally spoken is sometimes not the most reliable communication tool. On the other hand, written communication tends to over burden the system. Most departments' communication suffers from too much meaningless paperwork (Hottle, 1990, pg.80).

The author of this paper concludes that interpersonal communication is not an easy task, but the leadership must make every effort to work together to create an environment where interpersonal communication is effective, accurate and consistent. Through this authors personal experience, the knowledge, skills and abilities of the leadership of the organization has the most affect on its success or failure.

In comparison, the survey of WF/RS personnel that participated in the survey showed that officers had more dissatisfaction with the removal of battalion chiefs from shifts than did non-officers. This was no surprise because most of the officers are older and steeped in the traditional organizational structure. The 78.6 percent satisfaction rate for supervisors interpersonal communication was a surprise, because most of the complains were blamed on the supervisors poor interpersonal communication skills and prompted this author to research this problem. Complaints such as memorandums not being pasted on from one shift to the next, information not being pasted on from shift to shift, officer asking for a hand-line and getting a hand-light and information that was pasted on but had entirely different meaning. These types of complaints from personnel are the primary reasons the WF/RS Officer Development Program

(ODP) was developed and strongly emphasized improving communication skills for company officers.

Another possibility for the high score may be a lack of education of employees on interpersonal

communication. They perceive the supervisor's interpersonal communication to be good when in reality

this was where most of the complaints about interpersonal communication originated.

On the fifth statement 32% of non-officers disagree with the amount of education WF/RS provides

on communications, but as a hole 72% of the department agree with the amount of emphasis placed on

communication training. This percentage may reflect the complaints from personnel who were

mandated to attend team-building classes and traditionally firefighters dislike mandatory training.

The sixth statement asking for issues concerning communication falls into two categories: (1)

personnel feel they do not meet with or see enough of staff officers (division chiefs and fire chief), (2)

they want someone on shift to make final decision. It appears removing the battalion chiefs from shift

has left a void in interpersonal communications that the chief officers are not doing a very good job of

filling. This may also explain the contradiction of why 45.8 percent of the department feels interpersonal

communication has been effected negatively by removing shift commanders, but the other supervisor

communication scores are in 80 percent satisfaction range.

Ineffective communication often results in poor cooperation and coordination, lower productivity,

tension, gossip and rumors, and increased turnover (Gillespie, 1999, pg.3). With this challenge, it is

obvious the WF/RS and probably most other fire service organizations can and could do a better job of

insuring that all communications are effective, accurate and meaningful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The literature review revealed that interpersonal communications is a problem and imperative to the success of any organization. Because of the complexity and magnitude of interpersonal communications the WF/RS should continue to evaluate it for effectiveness and accuracy. It is recommended that a division chief be assigned to a committee for the purpose of discussing any communication issues or concerns from fire personnel. The committee would need to have one representative from each shift and meet once a month. This would allow an avenue for the entire department to express concerns and offer suggestions for improving interpersonal communications and the effectiveness of operations.

Although the Officer Development Program covers many communication issues, it is recommended that a lesson plan on how to communicate effectively with subordinates be incorporated into the current program. As stated in literature review, managers hate to give negative feedback to employees and this can lead to many problems. This lesson plan would educate the officers to the tremendous importance of interpersonal communication, what are the barriers to communication and what are effective ways of overcoming these barriers. A qualified instructor from outside the department should teach the class, which would eliminate some of the personal biases of staff officers.

As stated by survey and the literature review, personnel want to be kept informed and feel their input has value to the organization. It is recommended that staff officers conduct quarterly meetings with all officers and take the time to visit stations at least on a monthly basic and talk with personnel informally. It is also recommended that staff officers develop newsletter to keep personnel informed on major happenings and the status of the many projects.

Finally, it is recommended that a masterwork plan be developed so everyone understands what the goals and objectives are and how they fit into the picture. There are so many classes, fire prevention

programs, hydrant maintenance, business inspections, pump test and many other projects that

occasionally very important items are overlooked or completely forgotten. This plan would allow the

department to keep track of the status of all projects and prioritize them as needed.

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APPENDIX A

COMMUNICATION SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to identify the current interpersonal communication level and make the

necessary interpretation to suggest recommended improvements. The results of this survey will be

included in an applied research project for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer

Program. Your response to this survey will be anonymous.

    Please circle your response to the following questions:

1)   What is your rank?   FF   FF/Eng.   Captain   Div. Chief.   Other

2)   The removal of shift commanders from shift has had little affect on interpersonal communications.

     Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

3)   You are satisfied with the current interpersonal communications you receive from your
supervisor.

     Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

4)   Fire Department interpersonal communications has not affected your ability to perform your job
effectively.

     Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

5)   The department provides sufficient education and emphasis on the importance of effective
communication.

     Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

6)   Identify what are the issues, if any, and what can be done to improve communications: